



Debra McCarty, Water Commissioner

Response to the Guardian
January 24, 2016

Philadelphia Water is receiving questions from customers regarding the safety of their water due to an article published by the Guardian on Friday, January 22.

As the report contained a number of concerning statements and inaccuracies, we regret that it was published without comment from the department or any other agencies implicated in the claims.

To clarify:

- The purpose of lead and copper regulations is to protect public health by minimizing lead and copper levels in drinking water, primarily by reducing the natural corrosive qualities of water. The sampling protocols Philadelphia Water uses have remained the same since 1992, as originally laid out in the Environmental Protection Agency's Lead and Copper Rule. This allows us to maintain a reliable database over time so that if changes in corrosion control or water quality affect the leaching of lead, we would be alerted.
- Changing the way samples are collected would result in the loss of decades of valuable data tracking our corrosion control optimization. **Our procedures ensure that we maintain consistency.**
- **The article incorrectly stated that Philadelphia Water asks customers to flush systems before taking a sample. We do not ask customers to flush the tap before taking a sample.**

Recommended flushing occurs immediately before the start of a 6-hour stagnation time, during which water sits in the homeowners' plumbing. That flushing is required to ensure that cold water, not hot water, was last used 6 hours prior to stagnation. **Following the wait time, customers are instructed take a first draw without flushing.**

- **The article also failed to state that the testing method in question is only periodically used to determine lead levels in vulnerable homes in the city and represents a small fraction of all testing. Philadelphia Water conducts constant real time water quality monitoring, and customers would be notified of a change in water conditions that could result in impacts to lead plumbing.**

- Philadelphia Water [educates customers in high-risk areas](#) about ways to reduce the chances of lead entering the water from home plumbing. Those methods include flushing the water until it is cold and regularly removing and cleaning aerators.
- Philadelphia Water's testing program is approved the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the primary agency responsible for regulating drinking water testing in the state.
- As such, **Philadelphia follows best practices in sampling as approved by the state.** The proposed revisions to the current regulations are currently being tackled by the EPA, Pa. DEP and national water utility organizations such as the American Water Works Association (AWWA). **Philadelphia Water is a working member of this committee in recognition of its expertise in this topic.**
- As that process moves forward, we will continue to conduct individual testing for homeowners and work with these customers if lead level results are above the action level.
- We view protection of public health as a core part of our mission and work closely with the Philadelphia Department of Health. Over the past decades, **lead levels in Philadelphia children have significantly decreased as a result of education and outreach around lead in soils, paint, air and water.**
- **While testing is a requirement, our primary motivation in all testing is not to meet regulations, but to ensure that we are providing safe, affordable drinking water for the 1.61 million people who depend on Philadelphia Water every day.**

Our hearts go out to the residents of Flint. But there are clear differences between Flint and Philadelphia. **Attempts draw comparisons between the crisis in Michigan and Philadelphia's effective efforts to control lead contamination are inaccurate and highly misleading.**

Philadelphia has:

- An award winning source water protection program dedicated to protecting and preserving our drinking water sources—the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers
- Water treatment facilities that have been operating for over a century and consistently provide top quality drinking water
- Conducted a customer sampling program in accordance with the requirements of the Federal Lead and Copper Rule since 1992

- Maintained a robust corrosion control treatment program to minimize lead and copper levels in the drinking water
- Always made decisions regarding its treatment based on the latest science and best practices

Our 3,200 mile water main system delivers safe, clean and lead-free water to our customers' homes and businesses. However, customer service lines and plumbing fixtures may be made of lead or contain lead materials. The EPA's Lead and Copper Rule prescribes a systematic program for testing customers' tap water. We have successfully implemented that program since the program's inception in 1992. We will continue to work with our customers to educate and guide them regarding the steps they can take to minimize their risk to lead exposure.